Nursing & HEALTH CARE

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 8 OCTOBER 1984

The Gender Gap Philosophy: Numbers Count

Official Publication of the National League for Nursing

Editor
Dorothy Luckraft, RN, MA

Managing Editor
Janice E. Yaeger, BA

Editorial Office:
10 Columbus Circle
New York, New York 10019

Publisher
Melvyn A. Kohudic

Technomic Publishing Co., Inc.
851 New Holland Avenue
Box 3535
Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17604

Production Manager/Art Director
Anthony A. Deraco

Circulation Manager
Richard Dunn

Advertising Representative
Edward Willi
851 New Holland Avenue
Box 3535
Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17604

Advertising Representative for California, Arizona, Washington, and Oregon:
The Maurice A. Kimball, Co., Inc.
Gerald R. Holtz
1926 S. Pacific Coast Hwy. #228
Redondo Beach, Calif. 213/316-2158.

National League for Nursing
10 Columbus Circle, New York, New York 10019. Telephone 212/582-1022

NLN Regional Offices:
Northeast Region, 10 Columbus Circle, New York, NY 10019 212/582-1022

Midland Region, 111 North Wabash, Suite 1612, Chicago, IL 60602 312/782-2284-5

Southern Region, 50 Executive Park South N.E., Atlanta, GA 30329 404/321-5295

Western Region, 1232 Market Street, Suite 105, San Francisco, CA 94102 415/431-4622

NURSING & HEALTH CARE (ISSN 0276-5284) is published monthly (except July and August) by the Health Science Division of Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., 851 New Holland Avenue, Box 3535, Lancaster, PA 17604. Members of the National League for Nursing receive NURSING & HEALTH CARE as a membership benefit. Subscription rates for nonmember individuals: $17 one year, $29 two years; libraries and institutions: $25 one year, $45 two years; Outside U.S. add $10 per year for postage. Second-class postage paid at Lancaster, PA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Nursing & Health Care, 851 New Holland Avenue, Box 3535, Lancaster, PA 17604. Copyright 1984 by Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., except where otherwise noted. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited.

Nursing & HEALTH CARE

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 8 *OCTOBER 1984*

CONTENTS

Cover story: Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee Geraldine Ferraro (cover, center) has been the focus of attention in this year's political race to win the women's vote. The Republicans also attempted to bridge the gender gap at their convention, which featured U.S. Treasurer Katherine Ortega (upper left) as keynoter and highlighted (clockwise from upper right) Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler, U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole. This month's "Washington Focus," on pages 420-421, ponders the lesson to be learned from this ardent display of gender politics.

ARTICLES & FEATURES

435
Documental Learning
Margaret M. McGrath and Linda L. Skelton

441
The Use of Graduate Assistants in Nursing Education
Aloise Anne Zasowska and Lillian Soloman

445
A Theoretical Model for Clinical Specialist Practice
Frieda M. Holt

451
The Accrediting Community: Its Members and Their Interrelations
Richard M. Milard

DEPARTMENTS

403 Guest Editorial
404 Announcements
408 Upcoming Events
412 Consumer Capsules
415 NLN Perspective
418 News
420 Washington Focus
422 NLN Calendar
455 Bookends
456 Classified Ads

The editorial policy of NURSING & HEALTH CARE is to offer diverse views on subjects of interest to readers. Articles represent the opinions of individual contributing authors and are not necessarily those of the editor nor the National League for Nursing.

Official Publication of the National League for Nursing

The Use of Graduate Assistants in Nursing Education

ALOISE ANNE ZASOWSKA
&
LILLIAN C. SOLOMON

Graduate students have long been temporary members of the instructional personnel in American higher education. Over the years, in disciplines other than nursing, countless numbers of graduate students have been socialized into the teaching profession and/or have supported themselves through school by serving as teaching assistants (TAs) or research assistants (RAs) [*1–2*].

Literature pertaining to the use of graduate students as graduate assistants in American higher education deals with the origin and history of the TA System, the responsibilities and functions of TAs, views regarding the use of TAs in undergraduate education, and orientation and in-service education programs for TAs [*1–13*]. However, the literature focuses on the use of TAs and RAs in nonnursing disciplines. Notably, a majority of the research on this subject was conducted prior to this decade.

Because it is a known fact that graduate nursing students serve as TAs/RAs in some schools of nursing, the extent and scope of this practice posed an interesting area for investigation. Since the literature provided no evidence regarding graduate nursing students serving as graduate assistants (GAs), a national survey was undertaken, with a two-fold purpose:

1. To identify the extent to which graduate nursing students serve as graduate assistants in nursing education programs, and
2. to identify the selection criteria, functions and responsibilities, and financial rewards of graduate assistants in nursing education programs in which graduate nursing students serve in this capacity.

Survey Methods

Eighty NLN-accredited graduate nursing programs were included in this national survey. The chief administrative officer was invited to participate in the national survey either by personnally completing a self-administered mail questionnaire or by having the chairperson of the graduate program complete the instrument.

The instrument itself, developed by the investigators, contained 12 questions that addressed seven dimensions of the graduate assistantship: 1) use/nonuse of GAs; 2) criteria for selection; 3) roles and responsibilities; 4) length and hours of service; 5) financial rewards; 6) institutional policies; and 7) faculty beliefs regarding the use of GAs. Survey items were formulated following a review of the literature and interviews with two chief administrative officers who were familiar with graduate assistantships in nursing education.

Results

Sixty-seven graduate nursing programs (83.7 percent) responded to the survey. The 13 programs (16.3 percent) from which no response was received were geographically dispersed throughout the country.

Use of Graduate Assistants. Of the 67 respondents, 70 percent (47) indicated that graduate nursing students served as GAs in several capacities, while the remaining 30

Aloise Anne Zasowska, EdD, MS, is a consultant for the Council of Baccalaureate and Higher Degree Programs at the National League for Nursing (New York City). A graduate of Niagara and St. John's Universities and of Columbia University's Teachers College, she has served in various capacities in nursing education and curriculum development. Lillian C. Solomon, EdD, MA, is a professor and director of the Division of Nursing of the American International College (Springfield, Massachusetts). A graduate of New York University, the Catholic University of America, and Columbia University's Teachers College, she has served in several nursing education positions, including that of associate professor at the State University Center School of Nursing in Binghamton, New York.

©National League for Nursing — 1984

percent (20) stated that they did not have GAs. Among the programs providing assistantships, 15 percent (7) reported that only doctoral students held appointments of this nature.

The respondents noted that graduate students served as graduate assistants (GAs), teaching assistants (TAs), research assistants (RAs), and project assistants (PAs). In most instances (65 percent), a student at any level in the graduate program was eligible to apply for an assistantship. However, several respondents (33 percent) did identify a particular level as a prerequisite for application—for example, completion of two to three semesters in the graduate program (3), completion of three to four quarters in the graduate program (2), enrollment in the doctoral program (7), or completion of a course in curriculum and instruction (1). One respondent pointed out that the area of the assignment in the educational program determined the prerequisite level of the student.

Criteria for Selection. The 47 nursing schools that indicated that GAs were integrally involved in the nursing program listed several criteria that were used in the selection of the assistant. In most cases, a combination of criteria guided the selection process. Only one school reported that it had no specific criteria for selection. Table 1 presents the list of criteria reported by the respondents and the number of schools of nursing using each criterion.

Roles and Responsibilities. In describing the capacity in which GAs served their programs, the respondents identified clinical teaching, laboratory instruction, and faculty research as the three major areas in which GAs functioned. A majority of the respondents (72 percent) noted that GAs engaged in clinical teaching under the supervision of a faculty mentor; or, as reported by many programs (65 percent), they also provided instruction in the nursing laboratory on the college campus. In 63 percent of the programs, graduate students functioning as RAs assisted faculty with their research by carrying out such activities as library searches, literature reviews, and/or data collection.

With respect to the programs in which GAs provided classroom instruction (61 percent), most of the respondents (79 percent) described involvement in this area as "assisting only"; the remaining (21 percent) explained that full responsibility for selected classes was given only to the GAs who were doctoral students. In the 28 programs in which GAs engaged in classroom instruction, 56 percent of the respondents noted that GAs also assisted with grading and evaluation (primarily quizzes and examinations). Only 15 percent of these schools had GAs participating in the development of course outlines.

Addressing instructional responsibilities, approximately two-thirds of the respondents (32) indicated that GAs attended course meetings, but only about one-third (15) stated that GAs were present at faculty meetings. In only a few schools (4) did GAs serve on committees.

In general, whatever the number of assistantships a school might have, it seemed to be a common practice among a majority of the programs (35) to have a few GAs serving as TAs and a few functioning as RAs.

Length and Hours of Service. No one particular policy governing the length of service or the weekly time commitment for the assistantship was evident from the responses. Of the 47 respondents, 15 (32 percent) stated that graduate students were given this position for two semesters; 4 (9 percent) noted that assistantships extended over four semesters; and another 4 (9 percent) indicated that awards were made on a semester basis. An additional 6 respondents (13 percent) reported no limits on the assistantship, while 3 (5 percent) explained that students could hold this position for the duration of their graduate program. The remaining participants (32 percent) pointed out that the duration of the appointment depended upon the needs of the school, the courses taught, and the student's program of study.

Of the schools reporting use of GAs, 82 percent (39) cited 10–20 hours per week as the required time commitment; 4 percent (2) gave a range of 4–30 hours; 2 percent (1) stated that GAs usually served 5 hours per week; and 6 percent (3) noted that the weekly time commitment "varies." Two programs did not respond to this question.

Financial Rewards. Of the 33 participants who elected to respond to items pertaining to financial compensation for services, everyone stated that GAs received a direct salary, and the majority (23) noted that GAs also were given a tuition waiver. Details of the tuition waiver were not explored.

The schools reported a wide range in the amount of the stipend. Where GAs were paid in terms of per-hour

Table 1. Criteria Used in Selection of Graduate Assistants and Number and Percentage of 47 Schools of Nursing Using Each Criterion.

Selection Criterion	Schools Using Criterion	
	No.	%
Experience in nursing practice	20	44.4
High academic achievement (e.g., GPA, GRE scores)	17	37.8
Prior teaching experience	18	40.0
Course in curriculum and instruction	6	13.3
Enrolled in doctoral program	7	15.6
Teaching, clinical, and research experience	3	6.7
Experience in area of school's needs	5	11.1
Interest/request by student	6	13.3
Recommendation by faculty	2	4.4
Matriculated graduate student	2	4.4
Applicant's philosophy is compatible with philosophy of undergraduate curriculum	1	2.2

services (11 schools), the award ranged from $5.00 to $10.00 per hour; the average was $7.50 per hour. One school engaging both TAs and RAs stated that RAs received a lower hourly payment. Another pointed out that "TAs with experience" were given a somewhat higher award. Where stipends were awarded on a monthly basis (4 schools), the salary ranged from $325 through $600 per month. Thirteen programs gave GAs an annual salary ranging from $2300 to $6000 for a nine- to ten-month academic year. A few schools (5) elected to omit the amount of the stipend.

Institutional Policies. Of schools reporting that they had graduate assistantships, only slightly more than one-half (26) indicated that they had specific guidelines governing the services of GAs, and slightly less than one-half (24) offered an orientation program for the assistants. Twelve participants omitted this question.

The orientation of GAs to their functions and responsibilities varied among the schools. Of the 24 schools that offered an orientation program for GAs, 11 indicated that the program was individualized; 9 explained that the orientation was mainly to specific responsibilities and functions; and 4 stated that it was the same program that was given for new faculty.

Faculty Beliefs Regarding the Use of GAs. Addressing faculty satisfaction with GAs, 26 of the schools (55 percent) gave positive expressions about the use and service of their GAs. Twenty-three percent (11) preferred to note that the assistantship provided the student with a learning opportunity. Six programs (13 percent) expressed mixed feelings about engaging graduate students in the nursing education program, noting a "wait-and-see" approach and stating that students needed to devote their time to course work. A few participants (9 percent) preferred not to respond to this question.

Implications and Recommendations

This survey of graduate assistantships in nursing education, largely a general overview, raises many provocative questions and presents several serious implications for graduate students and nursing education.

True, the graduate assistantship offers nursing students an avenue for financing their advanced nursing education as well as a means for acquiring some experience in teaching and/or research. But does the assistantship provide graduate students with a valuable learning experience in all cases? Approximately two-thirds of the schools reporting the use of GAs allow their graduate students to apply for an assistantship at any level in the graduate program, and only a few require a course in curriculum and instruction prior to their experience. Are students who are awarded an assistantship in the first semester of the graduate program and who do not have any knowledge or understanding of the principles and methods of curriculum and instruction prepared to assist with the teaching of undergraduate students? Should the undergraduate student be taught by a less-credentialed, less-experienced teacher than the qualified faculty? Ideally, should not the graduate student devote full time and attention, especially during the first year, to becoming adjusted to advanced academic study [*2*]?

Higher education has established the role of the graduate assistant over a period of several decades. It has been suggested that assistantships should be incorporated into master's degree and doctoral programs in nursing education [*14*]. Less than wide and rapid dissemination of this idea in graduate nursing education is probably advantageous at this time.

Establishing a sound GA system will require considerable time and energy on the part of the faculty. To be educationally sound, a GA system must include such components as well-defined selection criteria, an orientation program, an ongoing professional development program, and a system for supervision and evaluation of the GAs.

Nursing has yet to develop the graduate assistantship into a viable component of its graduate education—an avenue where students may gain experience in teaching and/or research. Studies of the various components of the GA system in nursing education are needed at this time. Graduate assistantships may not be a feasible and/or appropriate option for every graduate nursing education program. The inclusion of graduate assistantships in a school must be approached carefully and deliberately, with the understanding that the associated responsibilities will place demands on the faculty and, ultimately, on the budget.

References

1. Storr, R. J. *The Beginnings of Graduate Education in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.
2. Chase, J. L. *Graduate Teaching Assistants in American Universities: A Review of Recent Trends and Recommendations*. Pub. No. OE-58039. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1970.
3. Ely, R. T. *Ground Under Our Feet*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1938.
4. Fink, L. D., Developing temporary faculty: The challenge posed by teaching assistants, *Educational Horizons* 55 (Winter 1976–77): 56–63.
5. Allen, R. D., Effective training for teaching assistants, *American Biology Teacher* 38 (January 1976): 24–27.
6. Dean, D. S. *Preservice Preparation of College Biology Teachers: A Search for a Better Way*. CUEBS Pub. No. 24. Washington, DC: American Institute of Biological Services, 1970.
7. Pickering, M., Should teaching assistants be asked to play the part of socrates?, *Chronicle of Higher Education* 26 (June 29, 1983): 56.
8. Berelson, B. *Graduate Education in the United States*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1960.
9. Wise M. W., Who teaches the teachers?, in *Improving College Teaching*, pp. 77–89. Edited by Calvin B. T. Lee. Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1967.
10. Mauksch, H. O., What are the obstacles to improving quality teaching?, in *Current Issues in Higher Education. Improving Teaching and Institutional Quality*, pp. 49–56. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education, 1980.
11. Stockdale, D. L., and Wochok, Z., Training TAs to teach, *Journal of College Science Teaching* 3 (May 1974): 345–349.
12. Bray, J. H., and Howard, G. S., Methodological considerations in the evaluation of teacher training programs, *Journal of Educational Psychology* 72 (January 1980): 62–70.
13. Charp, G., Acquisition of lecturing skills by university teaching assistants: Some effects of interest, topic, relevance, and viewing a model videotape, *American Educational Research Journal* 18 (Winter 1981): 491–502.
14. Panicucci, C. L., Faculty development: Myth or reality, in *Current Perspectives in Nursing Education: The Changing Scene*, pp. 46–53. Volume 2. Edited by Janet A. Williamson. Saint Louis: C. V. Mosby Co., 1978.